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4-16-2013

# Secular Catalysts for the Dissemination of Russian Orthodoxy: The Case of Russian Enterprise and the Tlingit Natives of Southeast Alaska

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Christian J. Robison

A DEPARTMENT HONORS THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE  
DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES  
AT TRINITY UNIVERSITY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION WITH  
DEPARTMENTAL HONORS

April 16, 2013

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Secular Catalysts for the Dissemination of Russian Orthodoxy: The Case of Russian Enterprise  
and the Tlingit Natives of Southeast Alaska

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Christian J. Robison

History generally tells us that the colonial exploits of the Russian Empire in modern day coastal Alaska could only be called successful at certain times during its little more than 100 year occupation of the territory. With the discovery of the Aleutian Islands by Vitus Bering in 1741, Siberian traders soon rushed to the Pacific Northwest in search of valuable sea otter pelts. This trade proved to be quite lucrative at the outset and thus, the famed Russian-American Company (RAC) was chartered to establish a monopoly of trade in the Tsar's interests.

With the ongoing activities of the RAC, the bureaucracy of the Empire desired to establish permanent colonial establishments not only to strengthen trade, but to simply extend its already vast territory. With these desires, colonial towns such as modern day Yakutat and Sitka were created with churches, military outposts and simple residences.

However, despite the once successful trading scheme of the RAC, Russian-Alaska would fail as a colonial enterprise. Its towns were never heavily populated with native Russians, the trade route from Alaska back to the imperial capital of St. Petersburg was extremely long and treacherous, sea otter pelts rapidly depleted in both supply and demand, the RAC was unable to compete with American and British traders and the Empire was in great financial debt after its loss in the Crimean War. With the sale of its Alaskan territory to the United States in 1867, it appeared that the failure of colonizing North America left no legacy but a few buildings in its former capital of Novo-Arkhangelsk.

However, if one visits the modern day community of Sitka, or many other communities in the southeastern panhandle of Alaska, one can see the true legacy of Russia's colonial pursuits. Today, many of the tribes of the native populations of Alaska such the Yupik and Aleut tribes, practice Russian Orthodoxy - a vital component of pre-Revolutionary Russian culture. In fact, Russian Orthodoxy is the majority religion of Alaska's native population. This phenomenon is especially strange when regarding the majority tribe of southeast Alaska - the Tlingit.

History from primary accounts of interactions with the Tlingit recounts the violent and resistant nature of these "Kolosh"<sup>1</sup> clans. Of course, the Russian traders' treatment of the natives with the enslavement of Aleutian tribes and the lack of mercy towards the Sitkan clans at the Battles for Sitka in 1802 and 1804 can reflect the beginning of hostilities. This hostile relationship between the Russians and the Kolosh would be almost incessant in the first half of the nineteenth century.

However, despite the turbulent history those defined Russian-Tlingit interaction before the transfer of Alaska to the United States in 1867, the majority of the Tlingit people would fully adopt Russian Orthodoxy as their own religion, and subsequently, partly identify themselves as Russian subjects of the Tsar. But, a question still remains: what factors were key in bringing this initially resistant tribe to a faith and culture that seemed vastly different from their own?

Father Michael Oleksa, a prominent clergyman and authority of the history of the Church in Alaska argues that Orthodox missionary practices were vital in converting the tribes of Alaska to Eastern Christianity. Unlike its Western Protestant counterpart, Orthodox missionary tradition attempts to adapt to culture rather than suppress it in the name of "civilized Christianity." Such measures in this procedure include but are not limited to the translation of Scripture to the

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<sup>1</sup> The Russian term for the Tlingit during Russia's occupation of southeast Alaska.

vernacular language of the area and the use of innate cultural understanding to manifest itself in Christian teaching.

As the theologian Mousalimas notes, innate cultural characteristics of the Tlingit allowed such tribes to understand and adopt the teachings of Orthodoxy after several events such as the disease epidemic that swept through Novo-Arkhangelsk in 1836. Conversations with current residents of Sitka including Father Michael Boyle of St. Michael's Cathedral and head anthropologist at Sitka National Park, Dr. Anna Dittimar confirm the importance of pre-Christian Tlingit thought with the ultimate widespread conversion to Orthodoxy. However as Ivan Veniaminov, better known as Bishop Innocent, recounts in his journals, his translation of texts into Tlingit and his educational schemes directed towards Creole children, were not enough to bring about significant religious and therefore cultural change in the Tlingit.

In present day Sitka, and throughout the southeastern portion of the state where a large number of Tlingit natives reside, it is more than obvious that a combination of missionary work and theological understanding on behalf of the native population yielded a current population adherent to the practice of Russian Orthodoxy. However, it is important to note that again, numerous sources, whether they be the aforementioned primary accounts or secondary research, demonstrate that the path to widespread conversion of the Tlingit can be regarded as uniquely different from that of other Alaskan tribes, namely the Aleuts - a people that first interacted with Russian traders upon their discovery of the Alaskan territory.

Therefore, it can be reasonable to assume that with the evaluation of Orthodox missionary history in Alaska alongside the general history of the Russian Empire's Alaskan colonial ventures that other factors aside from missionary work and theological understanding, may have played crucial roles that would have allowed for widespread conversion to take place.

With that said, it is important to note that no factor should be at all discredited from the occurrence of this cultural shift - all such factors worked in some sort of fashion to create the possibility of such change.

In order to evaluate such a hypothesis, it is necessary to first more fully describe the content behind Orthodox theological ideas and practices credited with bringing about comprehension of Russian Orthodoxy on behalf of the Tlingit population. With these theological concepts in mind, we contextualize how Orthodoxy developed a presence in Tlingit culture within the framework of Russia's colonial history in southeast Alaska - namely Sitka and the near surrounding area.

### **Orthodox Theology Relevant to Native Alaskan Cultural Practice**

Before discussing the historical record of Russian interaction with Tlingit clans throughout the course of Russia's colonial ventures in southeast Alaska, it is important to be familiar with the theological principles that are unique to Russian Orthodox general and missionary practice. Consequently, description of these principles will allow for a comprehensive understanding of how Orthodox belief and practice may be relevant to Tlingit cultural and religious practice as we evaluate the historical record.

Eastern Orthodoxy has for centuries been by far the most dominant practice of Christianity in Russia. Though at times it has been afflicted by various theological schisms or secular historical events, various members of both the Russian clergy and laity claim that *pravoslavie*, that is "right praise," has retained the doctrine and practices set forth by the original Church established by Christ and His Apostles. Though such an assertion is often debated among various denominations of Christianity, Eastern Orthodoxy has taken various measures to retain a

standard of “right praise” in both doctrine and practical tradition throughout the course of a millennia.

As aforementioned, the emphasis on tradition in the Orthodox Church does not simply attempt to maintain certain rituals or various customs. Rather, the Orthodox define tradition as a concept that encompasses the entirety of the faith from overarching concerns such as various theological principles to lesser discussed matters such as the production of Church art.<sup>2</sup> This definition of tradition is not only important to understanding the practice of Orthodoxy, but of course is quite vital to understand the faith’s pattern of dissemination and continuation.

Again, the theological foundations of Eastern Christianity define the faith’s practice of conversion. At this point, it important to note that though the Orthodox tradition of creating new converts is, at its basic foundation, a theological principle of Orthodoxy as whole, we will see the physical manifestation of these principles specifically within a Russian Orthodox context.

Father Michael Oleksa argues that the success of the dissemination of Orthodoxy to a number of different people groups relies solely on the faith’s willingness to, in short, adapt to the culture of those targeted for conversion. More simply, when attempting to convert a certain population, Orthodoxy does not attempt to introduce religion and culture as a single entity. Rather, religion is kept separate from culture, which in turn, allows for Orthodoxy to again, adapt to the cultural practices of another nation.<sup>3</sup>

This tradition or precedent for conversion in the Russian context may be seen in the mission efforts of the Orthodox saints Cyril and Methodios during the late ninth century.<sup>4</sup> At this

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<sup>2</sup> Ware, Timothy. *The Orthodox Church*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963. pp. 196-197.

<sup>3</sup> Oleksa, Michael J. "Consultation On Christianity And Traditional Cultures." *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 26.4 (1982): 245-250. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*.

<sup>4</sup> Oleksa, Michael J. "Native Alaskan Resistance To Assimilation: The Legacy Of Saints Cyril And Methodios." *Sourozh* 47 (1992): 4-18. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*.

time in Christian history, Scripture and other verbal mediums of Christian teaching were provided only in select languages, that is, Latin or Greek. But, the ruler of Moravia, Ratislav, requested Christian missionaries and teachers be sent from the Byzantine Empire and instruct his people in the native Slavic tongue. This request was met with resistance from Church leaders in Rome insisting that these new Slavic converts use Latin alone in liturgical practice.

Despite these objections, Cyril and Methodios were able to gain permission and resources from the Church centered in the Eastern half of the former Roman Empire to translate Scripture and other written teachings into the local Slavic language. Oleksa argues that the method and eventual outcome of Cyril and Methodios' efforts allowed this ancient group of Slavs to become practicing Christians without having to sacrifice cultural identity. As Oleksa further assumes, it would have been much more difficult for Ratislav's subjects to accept Christianity if the consequence of conversion was to rid themselves of cultural vitalities such as language.

But of course, language is not necessarily the defining factor of a certain a culture. Orthodox missionaries would soon encounter other cultural aspects that would have to be dealt with when attempting to convey their message. According to Oleksa, the Orthodox method of conversion throughout the centuries is that of *enculturation*. Enculturation is defined in the Scriptural sense as "the planting of the Gospel [...] in the unique soil of a new culture, and allowing it [...] to mature at its own pace, to produce ultimately a new, indigenous Church" (Oleksa 534).

This practice should not be confused with syncretism: the introduction into the Christian doctrine or worship elements which are incompatible with the fullness of the Apostolic



Tradition.<sup>5</sup> It is reasonable to assume that Orthodox missionary practice must make careful note to avoid syncretism while allowing the former cultural practices of a certain population to manifest themselves in the identity of a “pure” Christian faith.

Now, it would be almost impossible to describe how enculturation was utilized when Russian Orthodox missionaries disseminated their message throughout Russian territory - every culture had unique circumstances that would be relevant to the doctrine of the Church. However, in the case of the Alaskan tribes, and later on in the specific case of the Tlingit, several areas of Orthodox doctrine would act as “points of comprehension” for the attempted conversion of the Russia’s indigenous colonial population. One such point of comprehension that seems to be the most relevant in the Alaskan context is that of panentheism.

Often times, the terms pantheism and panentheism are confused with one another. In short, pantheism can be defined as *all-is-God* while panentheism, a vital component of Eastern theology, can be defined as *all-in-God*.<sup>6</sup> The foundations of panentheism can be briefly described via Russian translations of the original Greek teachings of Saint Justin:

Богъ не есть имя, но мысль, всажденная въ природу челоувъческую, о чемъ-то неизъяснимомъ.<sup>7</sup>

[God] is not a name, but glory inexplicable implanted in the nature of humanity.

Despite this principle, that is that God, or the concept of God has been innate in the nature of humanity, the seemingly simple foundations of panentheism may still not be able to provide one with a clear distinction between panentheism and pantheism. This confusion may

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<sup>5</sup> Oleksa, Michael J. "Evangelism And Culture." *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 42.3-4 (1997): 531-538. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*.

<sup>6</sup> Mousalimas, S. A. *From Mask to Icon: Transformation in the Arctic*. Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox, 2003. 89. Print.

<sup>7</sup> Mousalimas notes the Russian translation from the original Greek can be attributed to monastic teachers on the island of Valaam in 1894. English translation is attributed to Mousalimas.

result in the possibility of syncretism that is admonished while practicing enculturation.

However, with a better understanding of how panentheism is manifested in the practices of Orthodoxy, it will become possible to discern this principle from that of pantheism.

The practice of Orthodoxy in itself is essentially meant to be a “participatory” practice. According to the Orthodox believer, one must actively participate in the key practices of the Church in order to view the manifestations of God and Heaven in an earthly setting. Two prime examples of this participation, examples that will prove to be quite vital and relevant to the panentheistic participation of pre-Christian and Christian Alaskan tribes, are that of icons and liturgical tradition.

Panentheistic participation in Orthodoxy can be most visible in the practice of iconography. These paintings of saints and celestial beings are not simply meant to enhance the aesthetic appeal of Orthodoxy. Rather, the strict traditional rules associated with the production and arrangement of icons is meant to connect the Orthodox worshiper with the Divine. Almost every single detail of the icon itself (e.g. color and lines) is meant to draw the believer into direct panentheistic participation with the divine cosmos. This participation, in essence, is the connection that allows a worshiper to be in full worship of the Creator or allows the worshiper to provide full reverence to a certain holy figure.

Though all Christian denominations have a practice of liturgical participation or worship, the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church is once again meant to provide the worshiper with a panentheistic manifestation of the divine. Almost all aspects of the liturgical and worship tradition of the Orthodox Church, whether it be the ornate vestments of the clergy or the beautiful singing of the choir are meant to draw the laity into an atmosphere similar to “the

throne of God.”<sup>8</sup> But of course, this panentheistic participation is not evoked by such an atmosphere alone, but it is also evoked by liturgical praise in itself.

One such example of liturgy that gives testament to the Orthodox acknowledgment of panentheism can be read through select passages from the liturgical celebration of the Passion: “The whole creation was altered by thy Passion: for all things suffered with Thee, knowing. O Word [Logos], that Thou holdest all things in unity.” Such acknowledgment again demonstrates the Orthodox belief in panentheism.

As of now, we have gained a comprehensive understanding of how the basic nature of the Orthodox faith and how this nature would direct the goals of missionary efforts. Furthermore, we have briefly touched upon specific aspects of enculturation and how these aspects lead into relevant points of comprehension in the context of the Alaskan missionary venture. However, we have yet to explore how exactly these theological principles are directly relevant to the cultural and religious practices of Alaskan tribes during Russia’s colonial ownership of the territory. Nonetheless, we contextualize these principles in the Tlingit perspective as we evaluate the religious and secular history of Russian-Tlingit interaction.

### **Synopsis of Russian Colonization in Alaska**

The colonial history of the Russian Empire in Alaska, and the presence of the Empire in southeast Alaska, can essentially be divided into four distinct phases: the “boom” phase (1743-99), the “Baranov” phase (1799-1819), the “halcyon” phase (1819-1840) and the “waning” phase

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<sup>8</sup> Wonnenburg, Rev. Diane. "Presbyterianism and Tlingit Natives." Personal interview. July 2012.

(1840-1867).<sup>9</sup> Each phase is usually defined by the increased or decreased presence of native Russians within the Alaskan territory, the establishment of settlements, and the organization and profitability of particular chartered trading companies (e.g. the well-known Russian-American Company). Non-secular history, that is history of the missionary effort in Russia's American colony, is also contextualized with these phases as well as a short period time after the transfer of the Alaskan territory to the United States in 1867.

### **The Boom Phase and Initial Contacts with Natives**

The first or boom phase of Alaskan colonial history began with Vitus Bering's discovery of the Alaskan coast in 1741, and the subsequent pursuit of sea otter pelts by Siberian hunters and trappers. At this time, the imperial government had little involvement in the monopolizing of trade in the area or the formation of law that would govern the actions of these trappers and traders. Simply put, this period of Russian colonization was mainly defined by competition between various Russian trading companies as well as foreign competitors, particularly Spain. Nonetheless, competition and the hunt of otters en masse would force Russian traders to expand their activities further east and south along the Alaskan coast.

Before 1799, that is, the year when Tsar Paul I chartered the Russian-American Company in order to monopolize Russian trade in Alaska, Russian traders had expanded their activities throughout the Aleutian Island chain, to Kodiak Island and along the coastline surrounding the Gulf of Alaska. Unfortunately, the rapid expansion may have been facilitated by the Russian scheme of ransoming and enslaving local Aleut tribes to hunt sea otters. Often times, *peredovshchiki* (Russian foremen) were in charge of forcing hundreds of Aleutian natives to hunt

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<sup>9</sup> Gibson, James R. *Imperial Russia in Frontier America: The Changing Geography of Supply of Russian America, 1784-1867*. New York: Oxford UP, 1976. Print.

for precious pelts as Russian hunters would readily admit their inability or lack of will to do so. Such a trend of overhunting that would rapidly deplete the sea otter population would only act as a catalyst for further expansion.

Eventually, the incessant pursuit of maritime pelts would lead to the first Russian-Tlingit encounter in 1788, when a Russian galliot visited Native settlements in Yakutat and Litya Bays.<sup>10</sup> This expedition from the leader of the former American Company, Gregory Shelikhov, was of course meant to discover new sources of enterprise. Along with this scheme, the commanders of the expedition were instructed to bury copper plates with the imperial insignia in order to claim territory. However, the commanders feared ruining their brisk and peaceful trade with the Tlingit, and therefore elected to give such plates to tribal leaders as gifts - gifts that would also later be used to symbolize partnership and loyalty.<sup>11</sup>

This expedition to Tlingit territory and other aforementioned secular activities did not bring about a true presence of the Orthodox Church, minus a few accounts of baptism and intermarriage. However, this phase of Alaskan history would lead to the conversion of other indigenous groups, which in turn would allow for the establishment of an organized Church in Alaska. Moreover, such events, seemingly unrelated to the Tlingit perspective, do in fact prove vital to the conversion of the Tlingit.

With the brief Russian-Tlingit interaction before the end of the eighteenth century, it is apparent that the activities of Russian interaction (i.e. the Church) with particular natives

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<sup>10</sup> Kan, Sergei. *Memory Eternal: Tlingit Culture and Russian Orthodox Christianity through Two Centuries*. "Early Decades of Tlingit-Russian Interaction." Seattle: University of Washington, 1999. Print.

<sup>11</sup> Before this first Russian-Tlingit meeting, it is known that the Tlingit had interacted with other Europeans such as the Spanish and the French.

correlated with the expanse of the fur trade and later on, the activities of the RAC.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the earliest known conversions of Russia's Alaskan natives occurred mainly within the tribes of the Aleuts. Though many Aleuts were taken as hostage by Russian hunters as previously mentioned, Aleut conversion occurred on a relatively large scale in a short amount of time when compared to the ultimate conversion of the Tlingit.

Such conversion corresponds to the first twenty years of the boom phase, though there was no organized mission until the 1790s. This is may be mainly due in part to the independence of Russian traders that existed before the chartering of several maritime companies. Such traders during this time period did not choose to take hostages, but in fact hunted alongside the Aleuts. Within a short amount of time, these Russian members of the Orthodox laity witnessed the panentheistic participation of the Aleuts within their own cultural perspective, and then proceeded to baptize such Natives.<sup>13</sup> A Russian hunter, Stepan Cherepanov, recorded in 1761, "We did not observe among them any special faith, except what is proper to any kind of faith." Though the clause "no special faith, except what is proper to any" may appear to be a general lay statement, Iakov Netsvetov, an Aleutian-Russian Creole priest, explains that the observations of Cherepanov can suggest innate panentheistic participation on behalf of the Aleuts:

While acknowledging the Creator of the universe, they also believed in spirits who ruled the world [...] They believed in birds, fish and other living things; and in the sun, the sky and other inanimate beings, thinking that spirits dwelt in them.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Starr, S. Frederick. *Russia's American Colony*. Durham: Duke UP, 1987. Print.

<sup>13</sup> Eastern Christianity allows the laity to perform the sacrament of baptism

<sup>14</sup> Mousalimas, S. A. *From Mask to Icon: Transformation in the Arctic*. Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox, 2003. 49. Print.

As Orthodox theologians note, especially S.A. Mousalimas, such innate panentheistic participation, which is clearly acknowledging the foundations behind the concepts of *all-in-God*, would be vital for the Aleuts to correlate particular practices of the Russians with practices from their own culture. Such an example of correlation includes the Russian and Aleut ritual of invoking the assistance of a deity before the hunt. As Mousalimas further argues, this correlation would lead to the evolution of the Aleuts' comprehension of panentheistic elements in the Christian perspective. The evolution of such comprehension would quickly spread among the Aleuts before the arrival of commercial enterprise.

Within the period of these two decades, Russian traders were able to establish the foundations of the toion<sup>15</sup> system. Such a system simply established distinct leaders within the Native communities in order to coordinate efforts or establish trade. More importantly, such distinction was most commonly marked through Orthodox baptism.<sup>16</sup> These toions of the Aleuts would eventually become leaders that could speak Russian and even perform sacraments of the Church. This system based on mutual respect would be unfortunately marred by chartered companies that would exploit the Aleuts for slave labor. However, the previously established toion system included leaders that would not only protest to St. Petersburg, but would also continue to lead Aleuts in the Orthodox faith.

Simply put, the initial interaction between the Russians and one group of Alaskan natives actually led to widespread conversion before the arrival of trading companies as,

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<sup>15</sup> A toion in this case is defined as a leader within the Native Alaskan community who retains the ability to be an intermediary between Native clans and Russian authorities.

<sup>16</sup> Both the Russians and the Aleuts associated Orthodox baptism as being "Russian."

for a variety of reasons, such Natives were easily able to grasp Christian thought associated with panentheistic participation. But, the arrival of large trading operations would begin a new dynamic associated with the conversion of colonial Natives.

The introduction of these operations also led to the first organized missionary efforts from Valaam and parishes from Siberia. These efforts ordered by both the Church and the imperial government, would follow the Russian project to establish a trading base on Kodiak island. Unfortunately, however, the initial occupation of Kodiak island was brought about by violent invasion in 1784, thus making the historical circumstances of initial contact with the Natives of Kodiak, the Alutiiqs, much different than the initial contacts with the Aleuts.

Despite these different circumstances, the organized clergy were still able to utilize the Alutiiq's panentheistic comprehension, very similar to that of the Aleuts, to bring about many baptisms and create true converts. Mousalimas attests to many Native primary accounts that reference the Alutiiq trust of the Russian clergy while not always trusting the Russian tradesmen. Thus, Orthodoxy was able to retain a foothold on Kodiak Island that would eventually allow for the next missionary effort to spread among the Tlingit.

### **The Baranov Phase and the Onset of a Tlingit-Russian Cold War**

The second phase or the Baranov phase derives its name from arguably the greatest pioneer of the Russian-American Company, and later the imperial organization of the Alaskan colony - Aleksandr Baranov. This vital leader in the development of the Alaskan colony and the establishment of Sitka, and the architect behind the nature of early Tlingit-Russian interaction, can be introduced via of a letter to the director of the Russian-American Company of 1805:



Я скажу вам, милостивые государи мои, что г. Баранов есть весьма оригинальное и притом счастливое произведение природы. Имя его громко по всему западному берегу до самой Калифорнии. Бостонцы почитают его и уважают, американские народы, боясь его, из самых дальних мест предлагают ему свою дружбу.<sup>17</sup>

I tell you, my good sirs, that Baranov is highly original, and, moreover the product of a happy nature. His name is [widely known] from the West Coast to California. The Boston men revere and respect him, the American people, afraid of him, [and] from the most distant places [they] offer him friendship.

Such remarks do in fact reflect the historical record of Baranov's style of leadership. He would be personally present at the Battles for Sitka in both 1802 and 1804, and took little to no hesitation in making crucial decisions for the RAC and imperial enterprise. But his leadership on behalf of the Empire would eventually lead to the tense Tlingit-Russian relationship during this phase of Alaskan colonial history.

As noted earlier, the rapid expansion of the maritime fur trade led to the first Russian encounter with the Tlingit just forty years after the discovery of the Aleutian Islands by Bering. Soon after, the imperial charter given to the newly formed Russian-American company would cause the need for permanent establishments in the southeast in order to meet the demand for otter pelts and other valuable furs. Baranov's initial expeditions in the Yakutat and Sitka territories eventually led to the establishment of the RAC's first fort in Sitka. At this time in particular, American sailors were the main

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<sup>17</sup>Резанов, Н.П. "Письма директоров Российско-Американской Компании 6 ноября 1805 года." *Аляска - Русская Америка - Российско-Американская Компания*. <<http://alaska-heritage.clan.su/index/0-265>>. (English translation by Christian J. Robison)

source of trade for the Tlingit in the area, so little trade occurred between the Russians and Tlingit for simply the lack of a greater Russian presence. But despite this lack of initial interaction, it appears that the practice of courting tribal leaders, in this case the giving of special gifts, in order to remain within Tlingit territory kept the initial contact between the Russians and the Natives relatively peaceful.

The next two years however, took a surprising turn for Tlingit-Russian relations as the Kiks.adi clans attacked the Russian fort in Sitka in 1802. Of course, there are several reasons why an attack may have been prompted by this particular clan of Tlingit Natives. Such causes include but are not limited to the prompting of American tradesmen to launch an attack against their Russian competitors or the Tlingit scorn for the Russians' Aleut slaves. Nonetheless, the aftermath of this attack led to small skirmishes and ultimately, Baranov's harsher methods of retaining a Russian presence in Sitka and the surrounding area.

Baranov essentially chose to expand upon two specific previously mentioned practices of Russian traders when interacting with Natives while establishing his new center for RAC operations: the practice of exchanging hostages and the courting of tribal leaders. Though early Russian hunters simply chose to take Aleut hostages to do their bidding, Baranov took advantage of the Tlingit inclination for trade, and thus allowed for several instances of hostage exchange with the intent to maintain a sort of status-quo. A year after Baranov was replaced as head of the RAC by a naval officer, an example of such an exchange took place in Sitka when Russian officers demanded hostages from visiting natives. But the Tlingit leaders instead suggested that hostages be given in return

which “meant that the Tlingit were insisting on a relationship of balanced reciprocity.”<sup>18</sup>

Such negotiation on behalf of the Tlingit not only reveals particular cultural norms, but again also reflects their initial attitude towards the Russians during their first encounter in the eighteenth century. Above all, these instances of hostage exchange assist in characterizing the Tlingit-Russian relationship as in a state of cold war.

The courting of tribal leaders did not just include gifts, but the further implementation of the toion system previously established in interactions with the Aleuts. Many aspects of this system remained the same when interacting with the Tlingit, but officers of the RAC more frequently bestowed visible gifts of distinction, such as medals or signed documents to tribal leaders. As regards to the societal structure of Russia’s new colonial capital, these Native toions would act mainly as mediators between Russian and Native parties when particular incidents heightened tensions in the area. But for Baranov, a system of mediation would not necessarily be enough to retain peace and therefore implemented other physical measures to insure security.

One such measure physically separated Russian and Tlingit society was a wall with numerous outposts was built around the settlement itself.<sup>19</sup> With this barrier, Baranov instituted various laws that would limit Russian-Tlingit interaction to trade, toion negotiation and at times interaction with matters of Orthodoxy.

Though the Russians were able to establish a populous trading base with many converts on Kodiak Island, the Baranov phase saw little organized missionary action among the Tlingit. As in the first twenty years of the boom phase and the conversion of

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<sup>18</sup> Kan, Sergei. *Memory Eternal: Tlingit Culture and Russian Orthodox Christianity through Two Centuries*. “Early Decades of Tlingit-Russian Interaction.” Seattle: University of Washington, 1999. 71. Print.

<sup>19</sup> Replica outposts in modern Sitka mark the original layout of the barrier.

the Aleuts, Baranov had select laity in his employment perform various sacraments, namely baptism. Though Baranov was not a deeply religious man himself, he recalled that baptism with the Aleuts and Alutiiqs proved useful in creating allies.

But it appears that making occasional allies was the usual end result of baptism and other sacraments for either one of two reasons: 1) The lack of clergy and other Russian natives did not allow for a better revelation of panentheistic participation and other traditions of Orthodoxy relevant to Tlingit culture; or 2) already tense relations between the two parties more than likely inhibited a majority of Tlingit from viewing Orthodox practices as similar to their own cultural practices. Nonetheless, Baranov's method of creating new allies via Orthodoxy would also fulfill the needs of Russian *promyshlenniki* (Russian employees of the RAC) whose own culture was deeply ingrained in Orthodoxy.

In fact, though the first official priest in Novo-Arkhangelsk would not be assigned to the area until 1816, Baranov had built a small chapel to attend to feast days and other important Orthodox holidays. As this establishment catered to the Russians' religious needs, Tlingit observers could have witnessed ceremonies and sacraments even during this period of tense and hostile relations. But more importantly, we can see a greater presence of the Orthodox Church that would prove to be a vital foundation for the organized missionary effort in Sitka and the surrounding area.

### **The Halcyon Phase and the Turning-point in Tlingit-Russian Relations**

The third phase of Russian colonial operations in Alaska is mainly defined by the reorganization of the RAC and therefore the increased role of the imperial government. But more importantly, this phase demonstrates a less chaotic period when compared with

the violence and rapid Russian settlement of southeast Alaska under Baranov. This lack of chaos would not necessarily cure the tension between the Russian inhabitants and the Tlingit Natives, but would most certainly bring about a new beginning for the dissemination of Orthodoxy in the region.

With the replacement of Baranov; the establishment of the permanent settlement of Novo-Arkhangelsk; trade moving towards the Alaskan inland; and the charter renewal of the RAC, the government in St. Petersburg began to pay more attention to the practical needs of the colonies that reflected much of the criteria associated with permanent settlements rather than centers of trade. With this intention, this particular time period saw the majority of the development of Sitka society that would eventually allow for Church leaders to have more frequent interaction with the Kolosh of Sitka.

Again, it is important to note restructuring the RAC and attending to the needs of permanent settlements did not necessarily resolve the tension in Russian-Tlingit relations established by Baranov. However, such changes did lead to personal interaction between several members of society. There is evidence of Tlingit employment in the RAC and intermarriages that were more common with the Russians and the Aleuts. But more importantly, much personal interaction was stimulated by the imperial-induced presence of the Orthodox clergy, most notably Ivan Veniaminov.

Veniaminov himself had long been a missionary and a teacher in various locations throughout far eastern Siberia. Before his arrival in Novo-Arkhangelsk, he was instrumental in solidifying the beliefs of the Aleuts and the inhabitants of Kodiak. However, Veniaminov would be constrained by the unique challenges brought about by the already distrustful Tlingit.

Veniaminov arrived in Sitka in 1834 with extensive knowledge and experience in evangelizing Alaskan Natives. He had already used his talents and zeal to strengthen the simple faith of the Aleuts and consequently created new Orthodox leaders among the native Alaskans. To add further to his talents, Veniaminov followed the old Orthodox tradition of teaching in the local vernacular and therefore managed to master the Aleut language. Not only did he manage to master spoken Aleut, but even went as far as writing and translating Scripture into a written Aleut tongue.<sup>20</sup>

However, Veniaminov would soon realize that his initial work and linguistic talents would not necessarily be sufficient in communicating with the Tlingit. The tensions created during Baranov's conquest were, again, still very high at the time of Veniaminov's arrival. During the early years of his time in the colonial capital, Veniaminov was confined to living exclusively on the Russian side of the barrier in Novo-Arkhangelsk, and therefore developed an initial view of the Tlingit as independent and savage individuals.<sup>21</sup>

It must be noted that his initial perceptions must have been heavily influenced by the hostility of the Natives in Sitka as well as his previous encouraging and peaceful experience with the Aleuts. But Veniaminov would not necessarily allow his opinion of the Tlingit to hinder his missionary efforts. Such efforts included, but were not limited to, his prohibition of bestowing gifts to newly baptized Tlingit and the instruction of Russian to the few converted Natives and Creoles. Soon, however, Veniaminov would be able to

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<sup>20</sup>Mousalimas, S. A. *Journals of the Priest Ioann Veniaminov in Alaska, 1823 to 1836*. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1993. Print.

<sup>21</sup>Nichols, Robert, and Robert Croskey. "The Condition of the Orthodox Church in Russian America: Innokentii Veniaminov's History of the Russian Church in Alaska." *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 63.2 (1972): 41-54. Print.

begin physically communicating with the Tlingit with outbreak of smallpox epidemic in the summer of 1836.

Though such an epidemic was a horrendous tragedy, Veniaminov would describe this event as God's divine Providence.<sup>22</sup> The epidemic itself would create a fierce battle between the Tlingit shamans and the Russian colonizers. The shamans correctly attributed the disease to the Russians, but attributed it to some sort of evil magic. Such a perspective would of course only hinder Veniaminov from discussing the tenants of Christianity among the Sitkan natives until after the epidemic ceased to spread among the Kolosh village.

But with the end of the epidemic, Veniaminov would note that although the Tlingit community had not completely lost faith in the shaman leaders of their society, they would become much more willing for Russians, especially clergymen, to be invited into their village. With such invitations, Veniaminov was able to better understand the worldview of the Tlingit and then record instances of panentheistic participation among the Natives.

As in other indigenous Alaskan cultures, any sort of "religion" was mainly expressed through the previously mentioned shamans. These shamans had essentially the same responsibilities and world view across all native Alaskan societies. For Veniaminov, the outbreak of the epidemic and his subsequent visits to the Kolosh village allowed him to better understand the role of shamans specifically within the Tlingit perspective.

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<sup>22</sup> Kan, Sergei. *Memory Eternal: Tlingit Culture and Russian Orthodox Christianity through Two Centuries*. "The Tlingit and The Russian Orthodox Church, 1834-67." Seattle: University of Washington, 1999. 99. Print.

Veniaminov would observe that these shamans who so vehemently opposed the Russian faith were, like Orthodox priests, in charge of essentially interacting with the divine during certain ceremonies. In essence, shamans invoked and communicated with spirits via rituals. As Veniaminov would describe, “The Koloshi believe that during the shamanistic séance it is not the Shaman himself who acts but one of the Yeik [spirits] who has entered into him.”<sup>23</sup> Most often, such panentheistic participation would be carried out through ritual masks.

As one may infer, the panentheistic participation via masks is quite similar to the panentheistic participation invoked by Orthodox icons. Like icons, these ritual masks were produced within a strict, ritualistic process in order to depict certain spiritual dimensions. When such sacred objects were produced and then ready to perform certain rites, the shaman would wear the mask to become a living representation or incarnation of the depicted spirit. Likewise, icons are meant to be direct incarnations of a saint or celestial being, and thus allow the worshiper to interact with the divine cosmos.

Though totem poles were not necessarily used to interact with the divine cosmos, such works of art can act as another form of visual history and teaching, much like an Orthodox icon.<sup>24</sup> The carving and erection of individual totems were used for a variety of purposes including the marking of a particular clan home, funerals, and even in shaming of a particular group or person. But nonetheless, each totem was commissioned in a manner and included various symbols that were often repeated (e.g. the Raven representing the Raven moiety). With such symbols, visual history is recognizable not

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<sup>23</sup> Mousalimas, S. A. “Point of Comprehension.” *From Mask to Icon: Transformation in the Arctic*. Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox, 2003. Print.

<sup>24</sup> Krause, Aurel. *The Tlingit Indians*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington, 1956. Print.



only within Tlingit clans but also with other groups of people. In today's Sitka, a particular totem contains the image of a white man meant to recount the Russian presence in the territory.<sup>25</sup>

It is foreseeable that Veniaminov would be able to use his knowledge of this Tlingit perspective in order to steadily communicate Orthodoxy with the Kolosh. His experience with the Aleuts and their initial understanding of panentheistic participation with the divine would also correlate with the Tlingit at a basic level. However, Veniaminov's great leap forward would still not cure the ills of hostility in the southeast. But nonetheless, such a foundation would continue to evolve almost exclusively within the Tlingit community in the following years.

### **The Waning Phase and the Evolution of Tlingit Orthodoxy**

The fourth phase of Alaskan colonial history is defined by the gradual decline of the RAC and the eventual sale of the Alaskan territory to the United States in 1867. As Tsarina Catherine II (1762-96) admonished soon after the establishment of maritime trade in Alaska, "Much expansion in the Pacific Ocean will not bring solid benefits. To conduct trade is one thing, to take possession is another" (Gibson 29). It appears that with the increased role of the government in St. Petersburg, the vast bureaucracy that included the RAC could not efficiently find new sources of trade after the virtual extinction of the sea otter population. Such a dilemma was only more complicated with the expensive trade routes to Asia, Europe and the United States as well as European political tensions that would result in Russian defeat during the Crimean War.

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<sup>25</sup> This totem can be viewed at Sitka National Park near the battleground of the 1804 Battle for Sitka.

All in all, Russia's presence in Alaska was in rapid decline after 1840. However, the Tsar's intention of attending to the needs of permanent colonial society twenty years earlier did result in the metropolis of Sitka. By this time, Sitka was a bustling center for trade and had almost 1,500 permanent residents that included native Russians, Creoles from all Alaskan tribes and of course Native employees of the RAC.<sup>26</sup>

However, Sitka was becoming much more of a settlement rather than an important port for the RAC. The declining fur trade essentially nudged the RAC into fulfilling the other duties of its charter including assistance for the Orthodox Church. Though trade was still present, the RAC became much more involved in the building of a settlement including the building of Churches and various structures. Consequently, this shift in focus would indirectly bring about much more open and cordial relations between the Russians and the Tlingit.

This momentous change in Russian-Tlingit relations would obviously prove beneficial for the Orthodox Church as this would allow for a short-lived mass interest in Orthodoxy on behalf of the Tlingit. Of course, the *toion* system remained, but more Tlingit were readily willing to be baptized for religious reasons rather than the pursuit of gifts that Veniaminov so adamantly opposed. Correspondence between Veniaminov and the new bishops of Novo-Arkhangelsk attest to a growing number baptized Tlingit, especially males, who actively participated in Church activities. Moreover, this same correspondence also demonstrates great progress in both the development of written Tlingit as well as the native aptitude for Russian and some Church Slavonic.

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<sup>26</sup> Golovin, Pavel Nikolaevich. *Civil and Savage Encounters: The Worldly Travel Letters of an Imperial Russian Navy Officer, 1860-1861*. Portland, Oregon. Western Imprints, Oregon Historical Society, 1983. Print.

But, as mentioned, this mass interest was short lived as the 1850's included less capable RAC leaders who would institute policies damaging to Tlingit-Russian relations. In short, these new leaders would implement new practices that would demonstrate Russian suspicion towards the Kolosh. This is very much unlike the policies of the 1840's that demonstrated mutual respect for each side of the village and the closer interaction between the Russians and Tlingit on a large scale.

As one can imagine, Orthodoxy lost a good amount of its influence in the Tlingit village that was hard gained through the work of Veniaminov and his immediate successors. However, this rapid shift on behalf of the Tlingit may also demonstrate that Orthodoxy had not yet gained a sufficient place in Tlingit culture. The struggles of the 1850's, struggles that included a great amount of violence, may reveal that the Tlingit were still more concerned with trade with the Russians rather than the practices of the Russians themselves. But with that said, we also know of particular foundations that would demonstrate Tlingit understanding of Orthodox principles in the next decade.

After the violent events of the 1850's, policies of the RAC would again shift back to the policies of the 1840's that were essentially characterized by Russian trust of the Tlingit. The RAC would again hire Tlingit natives and would allow large numbers of natives to enter Novo-Arkhangelsk for trade. A level of suspicion on both sides still remained, but a greater understanding of the practices of both parties was visibly present. Such an understanding is recorded by one observer, Naval Captain Pavel Nikolaevich Golovin, when a particular toion addresses the arriving Russian party:

The Russians and the baptized Kolosh believe in God and Jesus Christ who are in heaven. When the weather is bad, for a long time they pray and

ask God to give them good weather [...] We are not baptized but we also believe in God who is in heaven. We prayed to God [...] and God listened to our prayer and allowed us to see you; and so for us the sun rose and the good weather came, because if we cannot see the sovereign Emperor himself, who is strong and powerful, then we do see you, whom the sovereign Emperor sent to see us and converse with us. So we rejoice and praise God. I have spoken.<sup>27</sup>

With such a statement, it appears that not only had Tlingit belief manifested itself in some form of Christian monotheism, but also demonstrated a notion that the Tsar is associated with the Orthodox Church. In essence, this particular time of Russian-Tlingit interaction demonstrated Tlingit loyalty to Russia and subsequently to the Russian Orthodox Church. This loyalty, and the aforementioned Tlingit understanding of panentheistic participation in the Christian perspective, would continue even after the sale of Alaska to the United States.

### **The Sale of Alaska and the Tlingit Turn to Orthodoxy**

The sale of Alaska must have been somewhat confusing for the Native Tlingit. During the ceremony of sale itself, only a few Russians were present while the Sitkan natives were only allowed to view the ceremony from the water surrounding the former capitol hill. As noted, the Tlingit did have frequent interaction with independent American skippers prior to Russia's permanent

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<sup>27</sup> Golovin, Pavel Nikolaevich. *Civil and Savage Encounters: The Worldly Travel Letters of an Imperial Russian Navy Officer, 1860-1861*. Portland, Oregon. Western Imprints, Oregon Historical Society, 1983. 96. Print.

settlements in the southeast. However, such interaction occurred almost a century prior to the Russian sale of the territory, and most always included trade. But, Tlingit-American interaction would prove to be quite different from well-established Tlingit-Russian interaction.

Essentially, many oral and written accounts on behalf of the Natives demonstrate that the Americans, whether such citizens were from the federal government or independent men on the search for gold, treated the Tlingit as subordinates in the newly created American territorial society. Natives were not often hired for labor on behalf of American employers while Natives and Creoles alike were treated as “half-breeds.”

Such sentiments on behalf of the Americans could have stemmed from a push for American assimilation after the Civil War and American-Native interaction that occurred as United States’ territory continued to expand westward. Nonetheless, the actions of the new American population greatly contrasted with the hierarchy created by the RAC and the Orthodox Church. Not only had the Tlingit associated the Orthodox Church with their former secular ruler, the Tsar, but they had also been treated with a respect that resulted from the practices of Orthodoxy.

Within the Orthodox Church, the Tlingit were divided by race or caste, and were not necessarily required to learn Russian as many rites and Scriptures could be provided via Tlingit. More importantly, the Orthodox clergy that remained after the sale of Alaska continued to practice enculturation with their

Native congregation. Such was not the case in the arriving Protestant traditions of the Americans.

Sheldon Jackson, a Presbyterian minister federally appointed to be the first commissioner for education in the Alaskan Territory, had a missionary approach and educational philosophy much different from the Orthodox tradition. Simply put, Jackson, along with other Protestant leaders, would nudge Natives into assimilating into the American culture and custom.<sup>28</sup> The process of this assimilation included but was not limited to the abolishment of all former “pagan” traditions and the required learning of English.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, these practices that engendered a lack of respect for the Tlingit not only resulted in demoralization, but also led to discouragement from fulfilling many Orthodox duties.

At this point in history, that is the 1870s and the early 1880s, Church records show a low number of active Tlingit members. The organization of diocese within the now American territory was in flux, and again, the actions of many Americans did not encourage Tlingit to participate in Christianity whatsoever. However, the late 1880s and onward would bring about new charismatic leaders such as Father Vladimir Donskoi that would bring with them the same sort of respect that was introduced in the 1840’s and early 1860s.

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<sup>28</sup> This was a socio-politico practice that evolved from American-Indian interaction in the continental western United States.

<sup>29</sup> Oleksa, Michael J. "Native Alaskan Resistance To Assimilation: The Legacy Of Saints Cyril And Methodios." *Sourozh* 47 (1992): 4-18. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*. Amarok, William A., and Michael J. Oleksa. "The Suppression Of The Aleuts: The Conflict In Alaskan Education 1876-1916." *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 28.2 (1984): 99-114. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*.

The revival of orthodox practices in the region could be argued to be the foundation that would allow Russian Orthodoxy to be the majority religion of today's Tlingit population. Though Presbyterianism would also attract many Tlingit, it appears that the almost century long process of Tlingit comprehension of Orthodoxy finally took hold after the sale of Alaska and the initial interaction with the Americans.

## **Conclusions**

Though there would continue to be minor struggles in the development of Tlingit Orthodoxy including a tense rivalry with Presbyterianism after the 1880s, it is more than apparent that Orthodoxy is the dominant religion among today's Native Tlingit. Moreover, it is also apparent that the mass conversion of these southeastern Alaskan people essentially led into the development of Russian Orthodoxy within the Tlingit perspective.

However, as the previous discussion and analysis of both the secular and ecclesiastical history of Russian-Tlingit interaction during the time of colonization and shortly thereafter reveals, not only was the Tlingit case of conversion distinctly different from that of other Native Alaskan peoples, but secular factors were critical in the Tlingit adoption of Russian Orthodoxy. In retrospect, secular historical events dating from the first Russian interaction with the Tlingit in 1784 to the sale of Alaska in 1867 demonstrate that the mutual respect between the Russians and the Tlingit was a key factor to bring about the aforementioned modern phenomenon.

But, before such an inference can be further detailed, it is important to note that it is without a doubt that the Orthodox theological concept of panentheistic participation and subsequent iteration of such principles disseminated by zealous missionaries such as Ivan Veniaminov and Father Donskoi was absolutely necessary for the Tlingit to manifest previous

cultural practices into the religious practice of Orthodoxy. This panentheistic participation was also furthered through the already innate belief in some sort of omnipresent and omnipotent deity on behalf of native peoples.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, there is little doubt that the development of a written Tlingit language was crucial in the teaching of other Eastern Christian doctrines. However, though the initial interaction between the Tlingit and Russians was relatively peaceful and had the potential to bring about earlier mass conversion comparable to the Aleut and Alutiiq, it was quickly disrupted through the Baranov conquest of Sitka.

It may first appear that Baranov's exploits were incredibly detrimental to not only the Tlingit acceptance of Orthodoxy, but detrimental to Tlingit-Russian relations as whole. It can even be said that Baranov's violent establishment of the new colonial capital brought about much of the Tlingit hostility towards the Russians. Though it is true that the events of the Baranov phase stymied the adoption of Orthodoxy on behalf of the Sitkan natives for the early half of the nineteenth century, the establishments and policies of the RAC engineered by both Baranov and earlier precedents on behalf of Russian traders would create a hierarchy quite conducive to innate Tlingit cultural inclinations.

The main inclination in question, that is the inclination of mutual respect, can first be seen through the brisk trade and the presentation of crested medallions recounted in the episode of 1784. Eventually, this would develop into the relatively stable and effective toion system that was previously utilized on a smaller scale with the Aleut. Though the toion system would be mainly used in the Baranov phase and the early part of the halcyon phase to retain a status quo of tense peace, such a system would nonetheless continue to build upon the Tlingit desire for respect and trade.

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<sup>30</sup> Hope, Fred. "Presbyterianism and Tlingit Natives." Personal interview. July 2012.



But of course, it is important to recount that Tlingit, at times, did use the toion system and sacrament of baptism that often came with being qualified to hold such a position within the Russian-Tlingit social hierarchy, to gain gifts and prestige. Though not necessarily beneficial to the mission of Orthodoxy according to Veniaminov, such a secular establishment and practice would allow for the necessary interaction to build upon mutual trust between both parties.

Veniaminov may have described the smallpox epidemic of 1836 as divine Providence from God in bringing Christianity to the Tlingit, but within a secular perspective, such an event can be viewed as a catalyst for less tense and easier exchange between the Russians and the Tlingit. As noted, the newfound trust and curiosity of the Tlingit regarding Russian practices, most notably religious practices, allowed Veniaminov to freely enter the Kolosh village and begin to express verbally the ideas of Christianity. The Tlingit most certainly must have been impressed not only with Veniaminov's zeal and bravery, but also with his respect towards the villagers through his simple willingness to interact on the Kolosh side of the settlement.

The developing interaction of the clergy on a larger scale was almost immediately echoed by new RAC policies that would create open trade with the Tlingit on both sides of Sitka and also employ Tlingit workers. In turn, this would create a more interactive community in Sitka that would continue to develop trust and respect between the two groups. Moreover, this developing social structure would subsequently expose more Tlingit to Russian Orthodox practice and teaching. This more than likely would not have occurred if the Russians continued to distrust the Tlingit demonstrating little respect.

This principle, as well as the developing Tlingit-Russian society of Sitka, seems to hold true as a quick turn to violence resulted with the policy changes of the RAC during the 1850s. Almost immediately, the Russian decision to again become suspicious of the Natives is

correlated with declining Church membership and the sudden rise of Tlingit hostilities. This trend would continue until the policies of the early 1860s that would revert back to open trade and Tlingit employment.

At this time, we are also able to see that closer Tlingit-Russian interaction of the 1840s and 1860s would develop into the Tlingit view that the Orthodox Church was directly tied to the secular powers of Russia, including the Tsar. Of course, it is known that the Orthodox Church was included in the vast bureaucracy of the imperial government, but there is little evidence to infer that the strictly native Tlingit, not necessarily Russian educated Creoles, were aware of this actual association. Regardless, the association would not only allow for some sort of loyalty to the Tsar, but would even go as far as to the Tlingit identifying themselves as partly Russian.

This phenomenon was obviously problematic for the initial establishment of the American territory of Alaska. Not only did secular American settlers disrupt the social hierarchy first developed by the RAC and Orthodox clergy in the 1840s, but many American Protestant clergy also disrupted the basic Tlingit livelihood through their rejection of enculturation. Whether the Americans acted out cultural practice that stemmed from westward expansion or maybe even out of good intention, both the American secular and religious establishments would not attract a wide number of Tlingit due to the desire to rid the Natives of their previous and ancient cultural practices - practices that had now been developed within the Orthodox perspective.

With this disruption, it is quite reasonable to infer that the mass conversion of Tlingit to Orthodoxy beginning in the 1880s stemmed from the new Tlingit-Russian identity previously mentioned. At this point, Russian Orthodoxy had taken hold in many aspects of Tlingit culture - a trend that was hoped for by many Russian missionaries through their continual practice of

enculturation. The American attempt to practically reinvent Tlingit identity, an attempt that would not necessarily include respect of the Tlingit or their culture, may have been yet another catalyst for the ultimate creation of Tlingit Orthodoxy.

In modern day Sitka, the legacy of the Russian Orthodox Church complimented by the secular activity of the RAC is alive and well. This is not expressed through the many shops selling Russian matroishka dolls and Soviet pins or the rebuilding of old Russian establishments, but is seen through the households proudly displaying an icon of the Theotokos alongside clan art, the congregation of St. Michael's and Tlingit natives who have become leaders in the Church. The ideas of Russian Orthodoxy found a place among almost all native Alaskan peoples. Though it may have taken a longer period of time and particular secular events that created mutual respect and consequent loyalty to the Russians, Russian Orthodoxy is still firmly rooted in Tlingit culture as much as it is rooted in Russian pre-Soviet culture.

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